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ABSTRACT

To help determine the appropriateness of Illinois Board of Higher Education policies related to the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree, a study was conducted over the State Higher Education Executive Officers listserv to determine current state-level policies and practices. Six policy questions were posted to the listserv related to minimum specifications for general education coursework, core general education courses, requirements for providing transferable general education, guidelines for integrating academic and applied education, responses to articulation and career ladder concerns, and work-based learning requirements. Twenty-two states responded to the query, with 12 states sending additional documentation. Responses indicated the following: (1) 13 states specified credit-hour minimums for general education coursework, 7 for technical/professional specialty coursework, and 2 for coursework that supports specialty areas; (2) 10 states recommended a core of specific general education coursework; (3) 1 state required that general education for the AAS degree be transferable, while 7 states encouraged it; (4) 1 state specifically recommended that colleges include integration of academic and technical education in AAS program design; (5) articulation concerns were addressed in state-level policy recommendations in 7 states; and (6) no state had specifically developed a policy prescribing that a work-based learning component be a part of the AAS degree, although in practice, many AAS degrees contained this component. Sample comments are included. (HAA)

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RESULTS OF AN INVESTIGATION OF STATE POLICIES FOR THE A.A.S. DEGREE

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SUMMARY

State educational agency officials from twenty-two states responded to a survey posted to the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) Listserv. Listed below are the questions in the survey and a brief summary of the responses:

1. Are credit hour minimums specified for general education coursework, for technical/professional specialty courses, for electives, and/or for a work-based learning component (internship, practicum, apprenticeship)?

Thirteen of the 22 states specified credit hour minimums for general education coursework. Seven states specified credit hour minimums for technical/professional specialty coursework. Two states specified minimums for coursework that supports the specialty area. One state specified minimums for electives. (See Table 1.)

2. Is a core of general education coursework specified?

Ten of 22 responding states recommended a core of specific general education coursework (e.g. communications, mathematics, humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences). (See Table 2.)

3. *Are colleges encouraged or required to include transferable general education?*

One state, Maryland, required that general education for the A.A.S. degree be transferable. Seven other states had policies that encouraged institutions to include general education that transferred: Alaska, Indiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. One other state, North Carolina, is working on a common core for the transfer of general education.

4. Are any guidelines provided for the integration of academic and applied education?

While several states mentioned the desirability of integrating academic and technical instruction, only Texas specifically recommended that colleges include integration of academic and technical education in A.A.S. (and certificate) program design.

5. Are articulation and career ladder concerns addressed?

Articulation concerns were addressed in state-level policy recommendations in 7 states: Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. One additional state, South Carolina, has been working to promote transfer, but , in most places, the A.A.S. is "still not considered equal to transfer degrees."

6. Is a work-based learning component required?

No state provided specific policy direction for the inclusion of a work-based learning component in the A.A.S. degree.

RESULTS OF AN INVESTIGATION OF STATE POLICIES FOR THE A.A.S. DEGREE

Jan Ignash

In October 1984, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) issued a *Policy Statement on the Associate Degree*. The AACJC *Statement* recommended that the A.A.S. degree be designed to lead directly to employment in a specific career, that trends in articulating A.A.S. degree programs with four-year baccalaureate degree programs were to be encouraged, and that the recommended title for these employment-focused degrees be Associate in Applied Science, although the degree could have additional designations to denote special fields of study. In July 1985, the National Council on Occupational Education, an AACJC constituent council, published 14 recommendations for the A.A.S. degree, including recommendations that the degree:

- be designed for immediate employment,
- identify a specialty designation,
- be limited to 60 to 72 semester credit hours or 90 to 108 quarter credit hours,
- contain 50 to 75 percent of the course credits in the technical specialty,
- contain a minimum of 25 percent of course credits in the general education component, with the combination of general education and related studies comprising up to 50 percent of course credits, and,
- set minimum criteria for admission to A.A.S. degree programs.

In 1986, Illinois adopted the model endorsed by both the AACJC and the NCOE. This model has been used in the approval of new A.A.S. degrees as awards for the satisfactory completion of a prescribed curriculum intended to prepare individuals for employment in a specific field. Much has changed, however, in the decade since Illinois adopted the model. New questions and concerns surround the granting of A.A.S. degrees. Among demographic, economic and educational factors, Illinois policy-makers should consider the following questions in revisiting the model A.A.S. degree:

First, how are increasing enrollments of older and non-traditional community college students affecting both the structure and the purpose of the A.A.S. degree? For example, at College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois, the average student is 29 years old. Will this student insist that she be given significant credit for life experience in the pursuit of an A.A.S. degree?

Secondly, how will the increased transfer of students in occupational fields affect the A.A.S. degree? Research conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges on the transferability of non-liberal arts courses in community colleges in Illinois, Texas, and California revealed that high percentages of students were able to transfer courses from community colleges to four-year state comprehensive universities in the traditionally occupational fields of engineering technology, business and office, and marketing and distribution, technical education (including

nonprogramming computer software applications, protective services, journalism, mass media, commercial photography, and commercial graphics courses (Cohen and Ignash, 1993). The overall conclusion from this study is that "[n]onliberal arts does not mean non-transfer."

Thirdly, will the A.A.S. degree increase in "portability" as more and more students return for additional training and education throughout their lifetimes to change careers or upgrade job skills? Will students tend to select additional education that articulates well with baccalaureate or other advanced degrees and avoid further education that is perceived as "terminal?"

Fourth, in light of the new occupational skills standards being developed as a result of national and state efforts, what value will the A.A.S. hold? Will skills credentials be the most important indicator of achievement—in effect reducing the perceived value of the A.A.S. degree?

Fifth, as a result of the dual trends of increased transfer of students in occupational fields and a national focus on workforce preparation, can the A.A.S. degree be incorporated into career ladders to facilitate life-long learning?[1]

Study Questions and Methodology

In order to gather information on current policies and practices throughout the U.S. to inform any effort to redesign Illinois' existing model A.A.S. degree, a policy study was conducted through the SHEEO (State Higher Education Executive Officers) Listserv. The following six policy questions were posed to the Listserv:

1. Are credit hour minimums specified for general education coursework, for technical/professional specialty courses, for electives, and/or for a work-based learning component (internship, practicum, apprenticeship)?
2. Is a core of general education coursework specified?
3. Are colleges encouraged or required to include transferable general education?
4. Are any guidelines provided for the integration of academic and applied education?
5. Are articulation and career ladder concerns addressed?
6. Is a work-based learning component required?

Results

Overview

Twenty-two states responded to the query, with 12 states sending additional documentation on A.A.S. degree standards and policies. Four states did not award A.A.S. degrees, including California and Kentucky. The state of Oregon does not currently award A.A.S. degrees, although officials are discussing an applied science or professional technical associate degree that might be transferable. In Florida, the last community college to offer an A.A.S. degree dropped the degree this past year

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[1] The ERIC Thesaurus defines career ladder as "Hierarchy of occupational progression, with training, from entry level position to higher levels in the same occupation."

because of restrictions on the general education core that rendered the A.A.S. identical to the A.S. degree.

Indiana was a special case in that state policy authorized only two institutions, Vincennes University and Ivy Tech State College, both two-year colleges, to offer A.A.S. degrees. (Ivy Tech State College has numerous branches throughout the state.) Four-year institutions, however, may offer A.A.S. degrees in special circumstances where the degree fits an institution's mission and builds upon institutional resources already in place.

Two states had A.A.S. degree designations, but no specific state models or policies governing these degrees. In Michigan, while each of the 29 community colleges offered a number of A.A.S. degrees, there were no state-level polices governing these degrees and each institution was responsible for determining its own standards for the degree. In New Mexico, the Commission on Higher Education had very limited authority to approve associate degrees and the content of A.A.S. degree programs is left up to the institution.

Sixteen out of the 22 responding states reported state-level policies that provided at least some direction on standards for the A.A.S. degree. A number had comprehensive policies governing everything from the number of general education and technical specialty credits, to direction for work-based learning components, to inducements for transferability of the A.A.S.

The results of the survey yielded the following general findings:

1. Thirteen of the 22 states specified credit hour minimums for general education coursework. Seven states specified credit hour minimums for technical/professional specialty coursework. Two states specified minimums for coursework that supports the specialty area. One state specified minimums for electives.

2. Ten of 22 responding states recommended a core of specific general education coursework (e.g. communications, mathematics, humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences).

3. One state, Maryland, required that general education for the A.A.S. degree be transferable. Seven other states had policies that encouraged institutions to include general education that transferred: Alaska, Indiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. One other state, North Carolina, is working on a common core for the transfer of general education.

4. While several states mentioned the desirability of integrating academic and technical instruction, only Texas specifically recommended that colleges include integration of academic and technical education in A.A.S. (and certificate) program design.

5. Articulation concerns were addressed in state-level policy recommendations in 7 states: Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. One additional state, South Carolina, has been working to promote transfer, but , in most places, the A.A.S. is "still not considered equal to transfer degrees."

6. No state specifically developed a policy prescribing that a work-based learning component be a part of the A.A.S. degree, although in practice, many A.A.S. degrees contain this component.

Degree Titles

Most states followed the 1984 AACJC recommendation to use "Associate of Applied Science" as the title for the degree. The AACJC recommendation was intended to avoided a proliferation of titles for associate degrees and confusion over the level of educational attainment achieved (AACJC, 1984). Just three states used a designation other than Associate in Applied Science in naming these degrees. South Carolina community colleges avoid the use of the A.A.S. designation, preferring instead to designate associate degrees in technical specialties (e.g., Associate in Engineering Technology, Associate in Human Services, Associate in Health Sciences). Virginia uses A.A., A.S., A.A.and S. (all baccalaureate transfer programs), A.A.A., and A.A.S. degree designations to denote seven occupational/technical program clusters, which can also include one or more majors that can be further divided into specializations. Ohio also reported a number of different associate degrees, including the Associate of Applied Business, Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Technical Study, and Associate of Labor Studies, (relating to the leadership of labor unions).

Responses to Survey Questions

The following sections summarize the responses to each of the six questions posed to state higher education executive officers in the Listserv survey.

1. Are credit hour minimums specified for general education coursework, for technical/professional specialty courses, for electives, and/or for a work-based learning component (internship, practicum, apprenticeship)?

Fourteen states had state-level policies stipulating general credit hour requirements for the various components of the A.A.S. degree, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: What are the semester credit hour requirements for the components of the A.A.S. degree?

State	Total Credits	Minimum Gen. Ed. Credits	Technical Specialty Credits	Electives or Support Courses
Alaska		15		
Illinois	60 - 72	15	50% or more	
Maryland	60 - 70	20		
Minnesota	60[1]	20	30 or more	
Nevada		18 - 24	30 (50%)	6 (10%)
N. Carolina	64 - 76	15	49[2]	7
Ohio	60 - 73[3]	14		
Oklahoma	60 (min.)	17	29	14 (related to technical specialty)
Rhode Island		25%		
S. Carolina	60 - 78	15		
Tennessee	60 - 72	25%	36 (min.)	
Texas	60 - 72	15	50 - 75%	
Virginia	65 (min.)	18		
W. Virginia	64 - 72			

2. Is a core of general education coursework specified?

The degree to which the content of the general education core was specified varied. Rhode Island's policy, for example, was the least restrictive and simply suggested that the general education component should "show appropriate regard for the humanities, the natural sciences and math, and the social sciences." On the other hand, Tennessee's policy was considerably more explicit, providing specific recommendations for a minimum number of courses within five different general education subject areas. The policy also recommended that general education should be a minimum of 25% of course credit "with the combination of general education and those courses serving the dual purpose of enhancing general human development and serving as the basic foundation for occupational studies constituting up to 50% of course credit."

Table 2 below lists subject-specific requirements for the general education component of the A.A.S. degree by state:

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1 Converted to semester hours

2 May include up to 8 semester credit hours of work experience.

3 Where licensing requirements stipulate, total credits may exceed maximum.

Table 2: State Requirements for the General Education Component within the A.A.S. Degree

State	Total Number of General Education Credits	Communications	Humanities/ Fine Arts	Social/ Behavioral Science	Natural/ Physical Sciences	Math/ Computation	Other
AK*	15	✓	✓			✓	where appropriate, safety, industrial safety, & environmental awareness
IL	at least 15	✓	✓	✓		✓	
MD	at least 20 hours	at least 3	at least 3	at least 3	at least 3	at least 3	
MN	at least 1/3 (30 quarter hours)	3	3	3	3 (OR 3 in Math)	3 (OR 3 in Natural Sciences)	at least 18 gen. ed. credits which support the technical courses
NV	18-24 (30-40%)	6 (3 Comm; 3 English)		3**	6	3**	3 Constitution; 3 Human Relations
OH	14	✓	✓	✓			
OK	17	3 (college-level)	6 (U.S. History & U.S. Government t)				8 in science, math, management., economics., communications, human rel.ations, or behav. Science
TN		minimum 1 course oral & 1 course written communications	1 course humanities or fine arts	1 course behavioral or social science	1 course (OR 1 extra math course)	1 or 2 courses	
TX	15 minimum	programs must provide competence in oral & written comm.	at least 1 course	at least 1 course	at least 1 course OR math	at least 1 course OR social science	programs must provide proficiency in math & info. technology
VA	18	3	3	6	3 (OR 3 in math)	3 (or 3 in social science)	2 Wellness & 1 Student Dvlpt.

✓ Subject specified, but no minimum credit hours specified

* Proposed policy, not yet approved by Alaska Board of Regents

** Can be separate courses or content embedded in other required courses

3. Are colleges encouraged or required to include transferable general education?

State-level policies on the transferability of the general education portion of the A.A.S. degree showed considerable variability, ranging from mandated transferability to differing levels of "encouragement" of transferability. A few states did not address transferability of general education for the A.A.S. degree at all.

Only Maryland required the A.A.S. degree to carry transferable general education, although a number of states strongly encouraged colleges to include transferable general education wherever possible. Maryland's policy was unique in that the general education in the A.A.S. must be comparable to the general education in the A.A. and A.S. degrees and will automatically transfer to any state institution. Achieving this statewide policy was not easy. In describing the process that lead to mandating transferable general education for the A.A.S., an official at the Maryland Commission on Higher Education stated, "We didn't water down the general education. Instead we elevated the level of general education taught at the community colleges and it did end up adding another level of developmental courses to the community college curriculum in some cases." (Michael Kiphard, personal communication, November 1996).

Illinois was perhaps typical of many states in that the question of transferability of the general education coursework in the A.A.S. was encouraged through the program approval process, although colleges could disregard the state's recommendation. State policy in Indiana was also quite typical in encouraging the transferability of general education coursework and stated that the A.A.S. should "[T]ransfer the general education courses that are part of statewide understandings regarding the transfer of general education credit to four-year institutions . . . "

Minnesota's policy clearly stated that "The general education portion of associate degrees should be acceptable toward baccalaureate degrees," but also provided very clear differentiation between the A.A.S. and other associate's degrees in a policy statement that read, ". . . associate degree programs are designed for one of two objectives, either to prepare for an occupation, or to provide a foundation for a baccalaureate degree program. It is important to distinguish between the two objectives and to convey a clear message regarding associate degrees to students, employers, and institutions."

In North Carolina, colleges have the choice of requiring transferable general education or making that option available to students. The North Carolina Community College system is currently working with the University of North Carolina system to identify courses from their common course library which will be guaranteed to transfer for general education credit. Educators also hope to develop "inverted transfer agreements" for A.A.S. degree programs. And while state-wide articulation agreements did not exist for specific technical fields, state level advice was available to students in the at least 32 programs. The guidelines were often general curricular suggestions, such as advice to students to take 8 credits of biology, 3 of psychology, and 3 of chemistry.

4. Are any guidelines provided for the integration of academic and applied education?

Only Texas listed fairly explicit guidelines for the integration of academic and applied education, although several states did address this concern in other ways. In Texas, one of the 11 program approval criteria for A.A.S. degrees states that the curriculum must be non-duplicative and integrate academic and technical competence. It must also provide a coherent sequence of technical, academic, and general education courses which span secondary and higher education and provide students with competence in critical thinking, math, science, and communication skills as well as integration of workplace-transferable technical and academic skills. In addition, Texas criteria specifically require integrated workplace and classroom learning experience for theory and applied instruction and experience in the area of study. In several other states, the integration of academic and applied education was implicit through the state's recommendation that colleges incorporate the SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) skills, which include critical thinking and competence in numeracy, into the curriculum.

5. Are articulation and career ladder concerns addressed?

In general, the purpose of the A.A.S. degree is to prepare students for the workplace. The definition provided in the Texas Education Code is typical in that it specifies that the A.A.S. is "a formal award which indicates mastery of a prescribed series of competencies with defined employment outcomes."

While acknowledging the focus on employment for A.A.S. degree recipients, five states also developed policy statements that related to the transferability of A.A.S. degrees to the baccalaureate. Most states in did not address the transferability of A.A.S. degrees at the state level but allowed transfer arrangements to be developed on an individual program basis between or among institutions. Maryland's policy, however, did suggest that A.A.S. degree programs "not preclude a student from transferring to a technical baccalaureate degree program such as a bachelor's in technology or to transfer nontechnical courses to a four-year institution." Oklahoma's policy statement also recognized the transferability of some A.A.S. degrees: "[t]his trend [toward articulation of the A.A.S. degree] is to be encouraged when appropriate." And Minnesota's policy recommended that "The general education portion of associate degrees should be acceptable toward baccalaureate degrees." Perhaps the sentiment of an officer with the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education in South Carolina is indicative of the work still to be done in acknowledging the value of the A.A.S., when she noted that, "Articulation from our technical associate degree programs into baccalaureate programs has improved in recent years due to a lot of hard work and improved communication. However, in most places these degrees are still not considered 'equal' to the transfer degrees." (Dianne Brandstadter, personal communication, July 22, 1996).

Tennessee was the only state which specifically addressed career ladder concerns and authorized two-year colleges to develop an articulated Career Mobility Ladder option which allowed up to 50 percent of the semester credit hours required for an associate's degree by examination. Credit must be awarded for specific courses and awarded only on the basis of successfully passing a challenge examination or a competency-based assessment. In Tennessee, institutions were authorized to develop articulation agreements that included awarding credit for

extra-institutional learning in 11 ways, including the use of the *ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Forces*, 2) *ACE National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs*, 3) *ACE Guide to Credit by Examination*, 4) *New Organizations*, 5) the College Entrance Examination Board Advanced Placement Program, and 6) individual portfolios using Council for Adult and Experiential Learning or other standardized guidelines authorized in advance by permission of the institution. Tennessee's policy is quite clear toward allowing credit for life experience in stating, "Articulation agreements should ensure that students are not forced by regulation to pursue training experiences aimed at competencies they already possess in order to acquire a credential."

6. Is a work-based learning component required?

No state provided specific policy direction for the inclusion of a work-based learning component in the A.A.S. degree. Oklahoma's response to this question was typical for most states: "[a]lthough a work-based learning component is not required, most associate in applied science degree programs have it and it is assessed in the evaluation of the program." (Cynthia S. Ross, personal communication, August 15, 1996).

Implications

Not surprisingly, most states followed some or all of the AACC and NCOE recommendations for the purpose and structure of the A.A.S. degree. Several findings from this survey, however, provide information that can be useful in re-examining Illinois' current model A.A.S. degree requirements. First, Illinois' credit hour requirements for the A.A.S. degree are generally consistent with the standards set in the majority of other states that responded to the survey. As shown in Table 1, the 15 credit hour minimum for general education is generally consistent with credit hour minimums reported by the majority of states (8 out of 14). Five states required a higher number of minimum general education credit hours, ranging from 17 to 24. Of the 7 states that specified credit hours for technical specialty areas, policy in Illinois was equivalent to that set in other states, except Tennessee, which required a higher number of minimum technical specialty credit hours.

Secondly, Maryland's policy requiring that general education in the A.A.S. degree be transferable bears special attention. Maryland state officials and educators expended considerable time and effort on the development of transferable general education for the A.A.S. degree. The benefits of transferable general education include enhanced career and educational ladders for students and in an improvement in the perceived rigor and quality of the A.A.S. degree. Maryland's policy on transferable general education for the A.A.S., however, required that, in some cases, another level of developmental education courses be added to curricula, and there are costs associated with developing and maintaining these additional courses. Where possible, colleges should examine syllabi and course requirements in applied general education courses that are not transferable and work closely with faculty at four-year institutions to determine if those courses could indeed meet requirements for transfer status.

education is to address both occupational and educational concerns. Coursework that is well-integrated should address both employers' needs and, to the fullest extent possible, be transferable to the next rung of the educational.

The fourth finding which bears mention is Tennessee's policy on granting credit by examination. The processes set by this state policy for allowing credit by examination appear to be rigorous and require that standards for competency-based assessment be met. In addition, acceptance of credit by examination must be formalized through the development of inter-institutional articulation agreements. Again, while additional costs may be incurred in this type of assessment, benefits to students may warrant consideration of credit-by-examination, especially for fields in which considerable numbers of students return to college for additional education after spending time in the workforce.

In sum, the standards that Illinois has set for the model A.A.S. have served it well over the last decade. But the characteristics of students who pursue the A.A.S. degree has changed recently and will continue to change. Any redesign of Illinois' A.A.S. degree must consider the increase of non-traditional students, an increase in student transfer activity from occupational programs, and the need for A.A.S. degrees to fit into well-designed career and educational ladders to allow citizens to pursue further education throughout their lives with as few structural barriers as possible.

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